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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this guide is to provide Americans who are teaching English to the Hmongs with a set of pronunciation lessons. These lessons are geared both to the particular problems Hmong speakers have in learning English, and to the particular pedagogical problems involved in teaching pronunciation to students who are for the most part illiterate in their native language. The 28 lessons deal with specific sounds. Teaching hints are offered, and list of sources for further reference is appended. (JB)

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Indochinese Refugee Education Guides

#21

GENERAL INFORMATION SERIES: English Pronunciation Lessons for Hmongs

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I. Introduction

The purpose of this Guide is to provide Americans who are teaching English to the Hmongs with a set of pronunciation lessons. These lessons are geared both to the particular problems Hmong speakers have in learning English, and also to the particular pedagogical problems involved in teaching pronunciation to students who are for the most part illiterate in their native language(s).

This is the fifth Guide the National Indochinese Clearinghouse has written on the Hmongs. The others are General Information Series #14, The Hmong Language: Sounds and Alphabets; General Information Series #15, The Hmong Language: Sentences, Phrases and Words; General Information Series #16, Glimpses of Hmong Culture and Recent History in Laos; and General Information Series #17, A Selected, Annotated Bibliography of Materials on the Hmongs of Laos.*

In developing these pronunciation lessons, we first looked at the sound systems of English and Hmong, and noted those differences which are likely to produce problems for the Hmong student learning English. We then formally tested Hmongs in Missoula, Montana, and Orange County, California, to see which of the predicted problems turned out to be actual problems. We have also listened to the pronunciation of Hmongs in English classes throughout the country, to see if problems occur which were not predicted by the analysis of the sound systems.

Throughout the Guide, we will use letters enclosed in square brackets to represent sounds, and will underline examples spelled in ordinary English spelling. We will talk, for example, about the sound [š] as in show and emotion. The unfamiliar symbols will always be immediately illustrated with examples in normal spelling.

You will probably find that for many of your Hmong students the lessons will tend toward over-completeness. We have assumed that your students speak only Hmong, and have had no contact with other languages. A particular student's problems in pronouncing English will be determined in general by the differences between the sound system of his native language and that of English -- but additional language experiences the student has had will also be a factor. The

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*Guides 14, 15 and 16 are available from the same source as these lessons; Guide 17 is available only through EDRS (see Sources for Further Reference, page 44, for ordering information).

monolingual Hmong speaker, for example, will have difficulty with [p], [t] and [k] at the ends of words; the Hmong who speaks Lao fluently, however, will not find these difficult, as [p], [t] and [k] occur at the ends of words in Lao. In effect, the more languages a student has under his belt, the fewer his chances are of running across something totally unfamiliar to him as he learns English.

Given their status as a minority in Laos, the existence of so many other minority languages in Laos, and their recent history, most Hmongs have had relatively wide exposure to other languages and sound systems. Even those who have never had occasion to learn to read are likely to be able to speak another language or languages to some degree.

While pronunciation problems per se are not likely to throw your Hmongs a curve, many of them will be unaccustomed to learning in a classroom environment. Experience has shown that this is the major pedagogical problem in teaching English to the Hmongs. The high incidence of illiteracy among the Hmong refugees (a natural consequence of the non- or pre-literate nature of Hmong society) requires adjustments in the standard materials and teaching techniques in ESL, almost all of which have been developed or based on the assumption that the students involved are literate.

On a subtler plane, the conventions of classroom behavior, which we learn (whether we like them or not) by the time we are eight or nine, and which are so second-nature by the time we are through college that they are beyond conscious consideration, are brand-new to many adult Hmongs. Americans teaching them are often faced with the necessity of overtly teaching classroom procedure at the same time they're trying to teach English. (An example: the Hmong students in a program in the midwest were thrown by the teacher's bringing a supplementary book to class, to augment the regular text; they didn't know why she had an extra book and they didn't.....)

By and large, teachers have found that -- borrowing a page from early elementary education -- consistency in scheduling of class activities, in use of text materials, in assigning homework and tests, and so on, is a key element in successful ESL classes for Hmongs. The Hmong who is new to classroom teaching, and therefore not sure what to expect or what is expected of him, finds security in a class situation in which he knows, from day to day and moment to moment, what's going to happen. Flexible scheduling and variation in activity, which

are possible and desirable with more educationally sophisticated students, don't work very well with Hmongs unaccustomed to classrooms, especially if there is no bilingual aide to explain what's going on.

Apropos of all this, then, we suggest that you set aside, each overall class session, a time when you work specifically on pronunciation. Pronunciation work should be separate from, and precede, any literacy work on the sound or sounds involved. Common sense suggests that a student who has a hard time distinguishing between, say, the [w] and [v] sounds will find it difficult to deal with a phonics lesson on the letters w and v. Conversely, the pronunciation of [w] and [v] should be taught entirely orally, with no use of the written language involved; otherwise the student will be so intent on dealing with the written word that the point of the lesson -- pronunciation -- will get lost in the shuffle.

Spot correction of pronunciation mistakes during the course of class should be coordinated with the pronunciation lessons. If you haven't taught your students first to distinguish [w] from [v], and then to pronounce them both in the right places, spot-correction of [w]-[v] mistakes will seem random (sometimes you will correct their [w]'s to [v]'s, and sometimes their [v]'s to [w]'s!) and confusing. If, on the other hand, you spot-correct only those mistakes you have taught lessons on, your spot-correcting will appropriately jog your students' memories, and reinforce what you've already taught.

II. Teaching the Lessons

The twenty-eight lessons deal with particular English sounds, or combinations of sounds, that Hmong speakers are likely to have trouble with. For the most part (except in later lessons on consonant clusters, for which minimal pairs don't exist), the lessons consist of minimal pairs, minimal sentences, practice sentences, and notes to the teacher.

Minimal pairs are pairs of words which differ in only one sound, like bat-vat, pen-pan, and so on. We are talking about sounds, not spelling: road and rogue are a minimal pair, despite the fact that their spellings differ in more than one way. (Their phonetic representations [rowd] and [rowg] indicate more clearly that they are minimal pairs.) Minimal pairs are used in pronunciation work to focus students' attention on the fact that a change from

one sound to another results in the production of words with different meanings. On being shown that vine and wine are different words, for example, your Hmong student's attention is focussed on the fact that in English the difference between [v] and [w] is important, or in linguistic jargon, distinctive.

Minimal sentences are just like minimal pairs, except that the words are put into sentences, e.g. That's a bat - That's a vat.

The practice sentences given in the lesson are engineered to provide students with multiple occurrences of the sounds in the lesson. We have tried to keep the sentences simple, and in basic tenses, so that they can be used in beginning ESL situations. You will undoubtedly want to make up practice sentences of your own, using sentence structures and vocabulary your students already have. The practice sentences will be to your Hmong students what tongue-twisters are to English speakers, and should be approached in a light-hearted fashion.

The notes to the teacher explain why the sounds in the lesson are problems for the Hmong speaker, and give suggestions and strategies for dealing with them. In general, we take the approach that consistent use of a sound that Americans will understand appropriately is as good, for purposes of communication, as perfect reproduction of the sound Americans use. We suggest, for example, that you not waste time trying to teach you Hmongs to say our exact [θ] as in thank, as a [†] for [θ] will be easily understood.

The minimal pairs and sentences, and practice sentences, are to be used first to teach your students to hear the difference between the sounds in question, and then to pronounce them so they can be understood by English speakers. After each lesson is taught, spot-correction will help to establish the understandable pronunciation as a habit.

To show you better how to use the lessons, we will work through Lesson One in detail in the following pages. We will assume that your Hmong students are illiterate, and so will focus on activities that don't involve reading and writing.

A cautionary word here about the use of pictures. Some teachers have found that an occasional Hmong student is so unfamiliar with the notion of pictures as representatives of the objects they picture, that he or she doesn't interpret pictures appropriately. (Traditional Hmong art doesn't involve representation of objects.) If such is the case with any of your students, you will probably find it pedagogically essential in general to overtly teach the relationship between

picture and object (a relatively simple matter of devoting a couple of class sessions to matching exercises with objects and pictures or photographs of the objects), before you do any teaching with pictures. (You could, conversely, deal only with real objects in your teaching -- some teachers do -- but it gets cumbersome; besides, your students sooner or later have to get used to pictures if they live in the United States, and it might as well be in the sheltered environment of the classroom.)

If you draw well, or know someone who does, the task of finding appropriate pictures is vastly simplified: you can simply draw pictures of whatever you want. If you don't draw, you have to find pictures, and your problem then becomes that of finding pictures that are big enough, simple enough and explicit enough for classroom use. We have listed, in the last section, several sources of pictures and drawings that have been specifically designed for ESL purposes, and strongly suggest that you buy them. They will save you hours of looking through magazines as well as cutting down on the frustration inherent in trying to explain the meaning of vocabulary items to people whose English is very limited.

Another caution: in choosing pictures to use in pronunciation work, stick with pictures of nouns. Actions (verbs!) are very difficult to picture explicitly, as ESL teachers have been aware of for years.

A. Teaching Lesson One

Approach

According to the notes, Hmongs will hear [b] all right, but will confuse [v] and [w]; they will have trouble pronouncing all three sounds. In general, you will teach your students to hear all three sounds appropriately, and then to pronounce them. You should break the lesson down, and deal with only two sounds at a time: you'll teach the perception of [b] contrasted with [v], then the perception of [b] contrasted with [w], then the perception of [v] contrasted with [w]. Then you'll teach the production of [b] contrasted with the production of [v], etc. (All this is harder to write about then to actually do.)

You'll need pictures to use as references; find pictures of a bale, a veil and a whale.

Perception

1. The first step is to establish that the difference between [b], [v] and [w] makes words different. Start with [b] and [v].

Prop the bale picture up on one side of the chalkboard or your desk; prop the veil picture up on the other side. Point to the bale picture and say bale several times; point to the veil picture and say veil several times. Your students will focus on the difference between [b] and [v] as the crucial element (with minimal pairs, they can't come to any other conclusion). There's no need to explain, further than the picture, what bale and veil mean; if your students are typical, they will be quite comfortable with a partial understanding of the meanings of bale and veil. (Remember that they are probably experienced language learners, and accustomed to the ins and outs of learning new vocabulary.)

2. Once you have shown that the meanings of words change along with the alternation between [b] and [v], you can teach your student to hear the difference (the notes say they'll hear [b] all right, so this part of the lesson will be easy). Say bale and veil at random, and have your students point to the appropriate picture (this is why you want the pictures at opposite ends of your desk or chalkboard!) (If your students are literacy-conscious, you might write a b over the bale picture, and a v over the veil picture; if your students know the names of the letters of the alphabet, they might insist on calling out the name of the appropriate letter. Anything like this is fine, as long as the focus of the lesson remains on pronunciation.)

3. Now pronounce words from the [b] column, indicating that these words "belong" to the same category as bale; say the words, pointing each time to the bale side of the board. Then shift to [v] words, pointing to the veil side. Don't explain the meanings of these words; your students will catch on that they're to listen for the [b] and [v]. Alternate between [b] and [v] words, pointing appropriately each time. Then continue alternating, but have the students point to the appropriate side. Continue the exercise, calling on individual students. Note that so far you haven't asked your students to pronounce anything yet; they will undoubtedly have repeated words, but focus their attention on the fact that they should be listening to you at this point, and not trying to mimic your pronunciation.

4. Remove the veil picture, and put up the whale picture. Proceed through steps 1-3, this time contrasting [b] and [w] rather than [b] and [v]. This will

also be easy for your students.

5. This next step won't be. Remove the bale picture, and put up the veil picture, and proceed through steps 1 - 3 with [v] and [w]. Your students will not be instantaneously successful in hearing the difference between [v] and [w], so you will have to spend more time on this part of the lesson. Even so, you will be surprised at how quickly your students will learn to hear [v] and [w]. When they can do step 3 with consistent accuracy, put the bale picture back up and go through the steps with all three sounds.

6. There are other perception exercises you might want to try, but keep in mind that with students unaccustomed to classroom procedures, the value of a new activity has to be balanced against the amount of time and hassle involved in explaining what you want your students to do. (If you have a bilingual aide, you can get the ground rules translated into Hmong; if you're on your own, be careful about wasting time on explanations.) Some common perception activities are:

a. Same-different: say bale - veil; your students respond with "different"; say veil - veil; they respond with "same", etc.

b. 1 - 2 - 3: label the pictures as "1", "2", and "3"; have your students call out the proper number as you repeat words at random. (This obviously won't work if your students don't know the numbers!) A variation on this is labelling the pictures with the letters b, v, w; your problem will be in understanding your students' pronunciation of the letter names -- which is what you're teaching, anyhow. It's best to not ask them to pronounce the letter names until you've taught them how; so play this game only if they insist on using the letter names.

7. The next step is to bury the [b], [v] and [w] words in sentences, giving the students practice in hearing the sounds surrounded by other sounds, as they are in normal speech. This is what the minimal sentences are for. Say the phrase a small bale, pointing to the bale picture; say a small veil and a small whale, pointing appropriately. Then say the phrases, having your students point. Again, it's not necessary to explain what the phrases mean; your students will be comfortable (and busy) listening for the [b], [v] and [w]. Proceed with other phrases -- make up your own, if you find ours inadequate, but be careful not to have additional occurrences of [b], [v] and [w] in them. (The phrase a big bale/veil/whale won't work because there's a b in big.) Be careful, when you work with phrases, to pronounce the words at the same speed that you ordinarily speak.

If you don't, you defeat the purpose of the phrases, which is to teach your students to hear the [b], [v] or [w] embedded in natural English speech.

Production

1. When your students can hear the difference between [b], [v] and [w] -- i.e., when they can do steps 1 - 7 above with almost 100 per cent accuracy, you can go on to teach them how to pronounce the sounds. Most ESL teachers simply aske their students to repeat the words in the minimal pairs one at a time, first with the students repeating in chorus, then individually. What the student does, essentially, is to try random pronunciations until he hits on one that sounds good to his teacher.

Point to the bale picture and ask your students to repeat bale after you. Concentrate on the [b] for the moment; they'll probably not get the [l] right, but don't worry about it. Get every student to come up with a [b] that sounds all right to you. Work through the other [b] words (you don't have to keep on pointing to the bale picture for this). Do the same for the [v] words, then the [w] words. This will take much longer than teaching perception of the sounds did, and it will be a difficult endeavor for your students. You will get bored with it long before they will, but continue until they can all produce acceptable [b], [v] and [w].

2. Have them pronounce the minimal pairs as pairs, with you checking to be sure that they mimic you accurately enough to be understood. You should be able to interpret what they say: use the bale, veil and whale pictures as a check. (If a student has said two words which both sound like whale to you, point twice to the whale picture; you'll get corrected. And so on.)

3. Reverse the exercises described in the perception steps. Have a student say one of the words at random, and you (or the other students) guess which word he meant. If your students are enterprising, they will remember the other minimal pairs, and take a stab at reproducing words from them; praise anyone who tries this, and encourage others to do the same. If your students aren't enterprising, you might bring in other pictures -- a bat and a vat, a vine and a bottle/glass of wine -- to elicit words other than bale, veil and whale.

4. Working with the minimal sentences, get your students to repeat the phrase after you. We have listed them with the crucial word first, then a shorter phrase, then the whole sentence or phrase, usually starting from the

end of the sentence and working forward (this is a standard procedure; native speakers of English alter the intonation of a phrase or sentence if they start at the beginning, but keep the intonation consistent if they start at the end).

The exercise should run something like:

You: bat
Students: bat
You: a bat
Students: a bat
You: That's a bat.
Students: That's a bat, etc.

We have tried, as we mentioned earlier, to keep the sentences basic and short. You will undoubtedly want to make up sentences of your own utilizing sentence patterns your students have been given.

5. The next step is the practice sentences, which will be very hard for your students, as they are overloaded with occurrences of [b], [v] and [w]. You might want to skip them altogether, if you find that you get bogged down in explanation, or if your students can't get the sounds right and remember the sentence at the same time. Handled properly, the practice sentences can generate a lot of fun and good-natured competition among your students.

6. As a final step, you should go over any vocabulary you have taught that have [b]'s, [v]'s and [w]'s,, pointing out the occurrences of these sounds.

Reminding

After you have taught the lesson on [b], [v] and [w], and are sure that all your students can both hear and produce the sounds to your satisfaction, you should correct their mis-pronunciations of [b], [v] and [w] as they come up in class. Your students will slip up on these sounds, even though they can pronounce them properly, when they are tired, or distracted, or when their attention is on other aspects of English besides pronunciation. Spot-correcting is most effective if you utilize a catch-word or phrase, rather than pronouncing the word correctly for your student to repeat after you. If you have lots of wall space, for example, you might post the bale, veil and whale pictures somewhere; then, when a student slips up on a [b], [v] or [w], merely point to the appropriate picture. This should be enough to jog his memory to produce the

appropriate sound.

B. General Hints

1. Probably the most important thing to remember in working on pronunciation is to keep your own pronunciation natural, and to speak at the same speed you ordinarily do. We all have a compulsion to speak slower and louder to non-English speakers; this is compounded when we are aware that our students don't read. You will probably have to make a conscious effort to teach yourself not to slow down. If your students comment that they understand everything that goes on in class, but can't understand people on the street, chances are that you're slowing down for them. Keep reminding yourself that it's as easy for them to deal with normally-spoken English as with slowed-down English -- and that ultimately you're not helping them unless you equip them to deal with the English they will hear outside the classroom.

2. ESL people disagree on the advisability of asking students to repeat words and sentences the meanings of which they aren't taught. Some teachers feel that doing so uses language unnaturally -- we don't use language without meaning -- and will put up with the nuisance of having to explain meanings rather than make the students parrot what are in effect nonsense syllables. We have found that Hmong students have a high tolerance for, and even an enjoyment of, this kind of "nonsense" in pronunciation work; at times, they have seemed relieved not to have to bother with meanings when they are trying to focus on pronunciation.

All of this is an issue in pronunciation work because minimal pairs often require the use of esoteric vocabulary (bale, veil and whale are excellent examples!) which is of no use whatever to the beginning ESL student, except as a vehicle for the crucial sounds. One teacher we know gets around all this by making up meanings for nonsense syllables. If she wants, for example, a [b] picture to go along with the vine and wine pictures, she draws something improbable like a car with an extra set of wheels on top, calls it a bine, and proceeds as usual. Her students love it, and she is freer to choose real words of real use when she can.

3. We have put all the lessons on initial consonants (consonants at the beginnings of words) before the lessons on vowels, and consonants at the ends

of words. (Hmong being what it is, there are many more lessons on final consonants than on initial ones.) It is easier to focus your illiterate students' attention on sounds which begin words (this is why virtually all literacy materials focus on beginning letters) than on sounds which end words. We therefore postpone work on the final consonants (which are the most important problems your Hmong students will have) until after the students have gotten used to the notion of pronunciation lessons, and to classroom procedures involved in teaching pronunciation.

Lesson One

[b], [v] and [w] at the beginnings of words

[b]	[v]	[w]
bat	vat	
	vine	wine
bale	veil	whale
berry	very	wary
bend	vend	wend
beard	veered	weird
boat	vote	
beer	veer	we're
bow	vow	wow

---

bat
a bat
That's a bat.

vat
a vat
That's a vat.

vine
The vine is nice.

wine
The wine is nice.

bale
a bale
a small bale

veil
a veil
a small veil

whale
a whale
a small whale

bent
It bent.

went
It went.

This is very weird beer.
Walt bent the vine.
Take the bat and the vat.
He made some very good berry wine.

Notes

1. Your Hmong students will probably have no trouble hearing the difference between [b] and [v] or [w]; they will, however, need practice in pronouncing [b] and [v]/[w] so that Americans can tell them apart. [b] does not occur by itself in Hmong, but [mb] does; [mb] is an understandable substitute for American [b].

2. Both [v] and [w] exist in Hmong, but are considered the "same" sound. Your students will tend to say [v] for both v and w before vowels like e and short a, and [w] for both v and w before vowels like o and u.

3. Many -- if not most -- Americans pronounce wh and w words alike -- so whale and wail, where and wear, when and wen, etc., are homonyms. We're assuming that the [w] taught in this lesson is the [w] of wail.

Lesson Two

[ʒ], [z] and [ʤ] at the beginnings of words and syllables

[z]	[ʤ]	[ʒ]
zone	Joan	
zest	jest	
raising	raging	
	major	measure
fuzzy	fudgy	
	legion	lesion
		television
reason	region	
Caesar		seizure

---

fuzzy
It's fuzzy.

fudgy
It's fudgy.

reason
That's a good reason.

region
That's a good region.

I'm watching television.
We come from Southeast Asia.
Joan is changing the baby.
They are raising my pay.

Notes

1. [z] doesn't exist in Hmong. [ʒ] does, as does a sound very close to English [ʤ] (technically an unaspirated [ʧ]). Your Hmong students will tend to hear English [z] as [ʒ].
2. As you can tell from the esoteric nature of the pairs, [ʒ] doesn't occur very often in English. The [z] sound is important to teach carefully, as it looms large in the plural, possessive, and third-person s forms.

Lesson Three

[θ] and [†]

[θ] (thank)	[†] (tank)
thick	tick
thigh	tie
thin	tin
thought	taught
three	tree
bath	bat
tooth	toot
math	mat

---

thin	tin
a thin man	a tin man
He's a thin man.	He's a tin man.
bath	bat
a bath	a bat
I took a bath.	I took a bat.

There are three trees in the yard.
Thank you for the tie.
They both took a bath on the boat.
She taught math.

Notes

1. [θ] as in thank does not occur in Hmong. Your Hmong students will need help in learning to hear the difference between [θ] and [†].
2. It is not worth the time it takes to teach students how to pronounce a correct [θ]. They will naturally substitute a [†], which will be easily understood by Americans. You will probably not want to spend much time on this lesson, beyond making sure that your students understand that English th represents a sound different from [†].

Lesson Four

[ð] and [d]

[ð] (<u>th</u>en)	[d] (<u>d</u>en)
they	day
their, there	dare
the	
them	
this	
that	
these	
those	
father	fodder
mother	mudder
brother	

---

father	fodder
no father	no fodder
They have no father.	They have no fodder.
worthy	wordy
He isn't worthy.	He isn't wordy.

They're my brothers.
Those were the days....
This is my father.
My father and mother were there.
We talked about the weather.

Notes

1. [ð] doesn't exist in Hmong. [d] doen't either, but [nd] does, as does another sound very close to American [d] (technically an unaspirated [t]); either one of these will substitute just fine for American [d].
2. [ð] is not worth the time it takes to teach students to pronounce properly. They will substitute something close to [d] for it, which will be easily understood by Americans.

Lesson Five

[ɛ] and [ey]

[ɛ] (b<u>e</u>t)	[ey] (b<u>ai</u>t)
bet	bait
bread	braid
wet	wait
fell	fail
men	mane
get	gate
shed	shade

---

fell	fail
We fell.	We fail.
betting	baiting
betting it	baiting it
I'm betting it.	I'm baiting it.
shed	shade
in the shed	in the shade
It's in the shed.	It's in the shade.

The men will get the bread.
She braids her hair every day.
Wait in the shade.
The bread will get wet in the rain.

Notes

1. [ɛ] and [ey] will sound like the same sound to your monolingual Hmong speakers. Your Hmongs who speak Lao well will have no trouble with these vowels, as they both occur (in short and long varieties) in Lao.

Lesson Six

[ɛ] and [æ]

[ɛ] (b<u>e</u>t)	[æ] (b<u>a</u>t)
pen	pan
bed	bad
said	sad
left	laughed
letter	latter
guess	gas
men	man

---

pen	pan
the pen	the pan
The pen is dirty.	The pan is dirty.
left	laughed
They left.	They laughed.
men	man
the men	the man
Did you find the men?	Did you find the man?

Send the letter to the man.
They laughed and I left.
He wants some gas, I guess.
Say something glad, not sad.
This is a bad bed.

Notes

1. Neither of these vowels occurs in Hmong.

Lesson Seven

Final [p], [t], [č], and [k]

[p]	[t]	[č]	[k]
ape	ate	H	ache
cheap	cheat	Cheech	cheek
cope	coat	coach	Coke
pip	pit	pitch	pick
hop	hot		hock
loop	loot		Luke
	mutt	much	muck

---

ape	ache
an ape	an ache
He has an ape.	He has an ache.
much	muck
want much	want muck
She doesn't want much.	She doesn't want muck.

I don't like to eat cheap candy.
She cut her cheek.
Luke tore his coat.
The coach will watch the pitch.
Nick went back to the lake.
She woke up sick.
Sip from this cup.
Can you cope with English?
Pat broke his loop.

Notes

1. Lessons Seven through Twelve deal with single consonants at the ends of words. There are no final consonants in Hmong, so the final consonants in English will cause problems. Your Hmong students will have no trouble with final consonants in phrases in which they are followed by words starting with vowels, e.g. pick up, get along, etc. In these cases, the final

consonant will be "heard" as the first consonant of the following word (e.g. pi- ckup, ge- talong, etc.), and pronounced with no difficulty. Your students will have trouble with final consonants in phrases in which final and initial consonants get jammed together, e.g. cheap candy, back to the lake, like to, and so on. They will tend to simplify the consonant cluster in one of three ways:

a. By making the first consonant as much like the second as possible (technically, by assimilating the first consonant to the second), producing cheak candy, bat to the lake, lite to, etc.

b. By dropping the first consonant, producing chea candy, ba to the lake, and li to, etc.

c. By adding a vowel to break up the consonant cluster, producing cheap-ɨ-candy, back-ɨ-to the lake, like-ɨ-to, etc. (This is the same process Spanish-speakers go through to break up initial consonant clusters producing estreet for street, and so on; the process is called adding an epenthetic vowel.) Hmongs will break up consonant clusters with a vowel (which we represented as ɨ with a bar through it, and which is called - surprise! - "barred i") half-way between English i as in sit, and [ə] as in but.

Of the three simplification strategies, the last is the most successful: Americans can interpret epenthetic vowels better than they can supply missing consonants. You might try actively teaching your Hmong students to insert these epenthetic vowels when necessary, as a compromise between dropping or assimilating the consonants (which Americans can't understand), and pronouncing all the consonants perfectly (which Hmongs find difficult).

2. [p], [t] and [k], in particular, will be dropped in final position.

Lesson Eight

Final [b], [d], [g], and [ǰ]

[b]	[d]	[g]	[ǰ]
bub	bud	bug	budge
ebb	Ed	egg	edge
lob	laud	log	lodge
bib	bid	big	
	bad	bag	badge
Age	aid		age
	led	leg	ledge

---

bud
the bud
We found the bud.

bug
the bug
We found the bug.

log
the log
The log started to burn.

lodge
the lodge
The lodge started to burn.

cob
the cob
The cob tasted awful.

cod
the cod
The cod tasted awful.

The tide will ebb soon.
Abe led Ed behind the lodge.
The bug will walk to the edge of the log.
A bad egg made me sick.
Put the log in the big bag.

Notes

1. See Note 1 in Lesson Seven.

Lesson Nine

Final [m], [n], and [ng]

[m]	[n]	[ng]
ham		hang
clam	clan	clang
tam	tan	tang
Kim	kin	king
	lawn	long
	thin	thing
them	then	

---

clan
the clan
The clan was noisy.

clang
the clang
The clang was noisy.

kin
our kin
Our kin came to the house.

king
our king
Our king came to the house.

tan
a tan
He has a tan.

tam
a tam
He has a tam.

ham
Ham it up...

hang
Hang it up...

Our team won the game.
It's time to go home.
I'm cooking the ham for Tim.
Marianne got a fine tan on vacation.
The king rang the gong.
The young bird broke its wing.

Notes

1. See Note 1 in Lesson Seven. [mb], [nd], and [ŋk] occur in Hmong at the beginnings of words, but not other combinations of [m], [n] and [ŋ] plus consonants. (Technically, the nasals [m], [n] and [ŋ] occur in clusters only with homorganic stops). In dealing with final [m], [n] and [ŋ] in phrases followed by a word starting with a consonant in English, your Hmong students will substitute any one for any other one, e.g. tine to go for time to go, youm bird for young bird, cookin the ham for cooking the ham, and so on. This is a particular example of assimilation, the process we mentioned in Note 1 of Lesson Seven.

2. There are nasal vowels in Hmong (one of them occurs in the word Hmong!) Your Hmong students will probably interpret these final [m], [n] and [ŋ]'s (which are nasal consonants), as nasal vowels, and pronounce them accordingly. They will sound slightly French.

3. The word clan is very much worth teaching as a vocabulary item, as Hmong society is organized around clans. Your Hmong students' last names are very probably clan names, e.g. Yang, Vang, Moua, Xiong, Ly, Her, Hang, etc.

Lesson Ten

Final [s], [z], [š], [ž]

[s]	[z]	[sh]	[zh]
base	bays		beige
Cass	Kaz	cash	
Russ		rush	
ass	as	ash	
	ruze		rouge
	razz	rash	
	fizz	fish	

Cass
He paid Cass.

Kaz
He paid Kaz.

cash
He paid cash.

ruse
The ruse made her face red.

rouge
The rouge made her face red.

fizz
The fizz lasted a long time.

fish
The fish lasted a long time.

base
base better
I like the base better.

bays
bays better
I like the bays better.

beige
beige better
I like the beige better.

He pays cash for his fish.
Russ has a rash on his face.
She buys beige rouge.
They fish for bass.
Mash the potatoes.

Notes

1. See Note 1 in Lesson Seven. Your Hmong students will tend to "epenth" vowels after [s], [z], [š] and [ž]; encourage them.
2. Remember that [z] does not occur at all in Hmong, and is likely to be confused in all positions with [ž].

Lesson Eleven

Final [l], [r] and Ø

[l]	[r]	[Ø] (= no sound)
foal	four	foe
peal	peer	pea
role	roar	row
tile	tire	tie
tell	tear	
bail	Bayer	bay
mile	mire	my
tool	tour	too
ball	bar	

---

tile	tire	tie
the tile	the tire	the tie
The tile was too big.	The tire was too big.	the tie was too big.

bill	beer
the bill	the beer
They have the bill	They have the beer.

ball	bar
a ball	a bar
She went to a ball.	She went to a bar.

Mr. Bayer will tell about his tour.

The bar bill was too high.

There are four tires on a car.

She walked a mile in the mire.

Notes

1. [l] and [r] will be confused with each other in final position.
2. There are many dialects of English which "drop" r's when they precede a consonant, substituting an [ə] (the vowel in but). Your Hmong students will easily be understood if they do the same, substituting their [iə] (the vowels in Maria) for eer, or [uə] (the vowels in pursuable) for ur as in tour.
3. Some Hmongs substitute a [w] for final [l]. This is easily understood by Americans, but carries a childish connotation -- many young children substitute a w for l until they learn to pronounce l correctly.

Lesson Twelve

Final [b], [v] and [m]

[b]	[v]	[m]
robe	rove	roam
dub	dove	dumb
cab	calve	cam
curb	curve	
lib	live	limb
	have	ham
cub		come
Bob		bomb
	gave	game

---

curb
the curb
Watch for the curb.

curve
the curve
Watch for the curve.

alive
It's alive.

a lime
It's a lime.

Have some ham.
Bob has a lime green robe.
This is a dumb game.
Is it game time yet?
Bob put the cub on the curb.

Notes

1. See Note 1 for Lesson Seven.
2. Hmongs tend to confuse [b], [v] and [m] in final position in words, probably because the occurrences of [b], [v] and [m] in Hmong in general don't match up to their counterparts in English. See Note 1 in Lesson One.

Lesson Thirteen

Final consonant clusters: [ps]

[p]	[ps]	[s]
cup	cups	cuss
top	tops	toss
ape	apes	ace
clap	claps	class
mop	mops	moss
loop	loops	loose
dope	dopes	dose

---

cups
the cups
The cups cost him a lot.

cuss
the cuss
The cuss cost him a lot.

apes
the apes
The apes got lost.

ace
the ace
The ace got lost.

Those mops clean well.
The apes tossed the cups.
These ropes are in loose loops.
The cops told them to stop.

Notes

1. Lessons Thirteen through Eighteen deal with final consonant clusters with [s]. These clusters occur frequently in English, as they are involved in the formation of the plural, possessive, third person singular, and lots of contractions. You Hmong students will find all these things doubly difficult: first, there are no suffixes in Hmong, so such grammatical elements as the plural and third-person suffixes will be difficult for them to remember. And second, there are no final consonants - much less consonant clusters - in Hmong, so these clusters will be difficult to pronounce.
2. Your Hmong students will tned to drop the first consonant in these clusters with [s] and [z].
3. As you teach the grammatical constructions involving consonant clusters with [s], you will undoubtedly think of exercises that combine the grammar and pronunciation. Don't be afraid to overteach these points, or that you will bore your students with too much work on the same subject.

Lesson Fourteen

Final consonant clusters: [ts]

[t]	[ts]	[s]
mat	mats	mass
hit	hits	hiss
loot	loots	loose
cut	cuts	cuss
lot	lots	loss
fate	fates	face
rate	rates	race
get	gets	guess

---

lots
the lots
The lots cost money.

loss
the loss
The loss cost money.

rates
the rates
The rates made us mad.

race
the race
The race made us mad.

I guess he gets lots of money.
He gets mats and cuts them up.
The snake will hiss if you hit it.
He cuts the grass for high rates.

Notes

1. See notes for Lesson Thirteen.
2. [ts] is an initial cluster in Hmong, so your students will have no trouble whatever pronouncing English final [ts] if the next word begins with a vowel.

Lesson Fifteen

Final consonant clusters: [ks]

[k]	[ks]	[s]
kick	kicks	kiss
lack	lacks	lass
sack	sacks	sass
buck	bucks	bus
lock	locks	loss

---

sacks
your sacks
I don't want any of your sacks.

sass
your sass
I don't want any of your sass.

bucks
three bucks
That's the three bucks.

bus
"3" bus
That's the "3" bus.

bucks
the bucks
He takes the bucks every day.

bus
the bus
He takes the bus every day.

He lacks a lass.
The locks cost five bucks.
His cheeks burned from the kiss!
That horse kicks and bucks.

Notes

1. See the notes for Lesson Thirteen.

Lesson Sixteen

Final consonant clusters: [bz], [dz], [gz]

[b, d, g]	[bz, dz, gz]	[z]
bug	bugs	buzz
robe	robes	rose
odd	odds	Oz
jab	jabs	jazz
breed	breeds	breeze
leg	legs	lays
cube	cubes	cues
ride	rides	rise

---

jabs	jazz
the jabs	the jazz
The jabs got to me.	The jazz got to me.
bugs	buzz
the bugs	the buzz
The bugs scared me.	The buzz scared me.
robes	rose
his robes	his rose
His robes pleased her.	His rose pleased her.

He breeds bugs in cubes.
Bugs have lots of legs.
Cubes have six sides.
Robes have arms but no legs.

Notes

1. See notes for Lesson Thirteen.

Lesson Seventeen

Final consonant clusters: [mz], [nz] [ŋg]

[mz]	[nz]	[ŋz]
clams	clans	clangs
Kim's	kins	kings
rums	runs	rungs
Tums	tons	tongues
	sins	sings
	fans	fangs
whims	wins	wings
gems	Jen's	
Tom's		tongs
bombs		bongs

Jen's
They're Jen's.

gems
They're gems.

clams	clans	clangs
the clams	the clans	the clangs
The clams were noisy.	The clams were noisy.	The clangs were noisy.

Tom's clans have wings and tongues and fangs.
Hmongs have many clans.
The king's fans rang the gongs.
She sings about her sins and whims.
Jen's gems really shine.
James bought some jeans.

Notes

1. Your Hmong students will tend to hear all these clusters as [nz].

Lesson Eighteen

Final consonant clusters: [l], [r], [s], [z]

[lz]	[rz]	[ls]	[rs]
calls	cars	false	farce
files	fires	else	
bills	beers	pulse	purse
pulls	purrs		horse
			worse

---

calls
the calls
The calls came quickly

cars
the cars
The cars came quickly.

bills
the bills
The bills sat on the table.

beers
the beers
The beers sat on the table.

pulse
her pulse
Her pulse shocked the doctor.

purse
her purse
Her purse shocked the doctor.

A secretary works with calls, files, and bills.
That's a fierce horse.
Nothing is worse than bills.

Notes

1. These clusters present problems; your Hmong students will confuse the [l]'s with the [r]'s. In pronouncing the clusters, they will tend to substitute a [w] for [l] and a [ə] for [r], both of which are easily understood by Americans. See notes for Lesson Eleven.

Lesson Nineteen

Final consonant clusters: past tenses with [t]

C (= consonant)	C + [t]	[t]
type	typed	tight
pick	picked	pit
like	liked	light
map	mapped	mat
cough	coughed	caught
cuff	cuffed	cut
pass	passed	pat
kiss	kissed	kit
push	pushed	put
match	matched	mat

---

push	pushed	put
We push it down.	We pushed it down.	We put it down.
We push Ken down.	We pushed Ken down.	We put Ken down.

cuff	cuffed	cut
You cuff the shirt like this.	You cuffed the shirt like this.	You cut the shirt like this.

cough	coughed	caught
We cough it up.	We coughed it up.	We caught it up.

The farmers hoped for rain.

We passed nine people.

Her shoes matched her dress.

She liked the map and mat.

She cuffed and kissed and pushed the kids.

Notes

1. This and the following lesson deal with consonant clusters that involve the past tense, and the past participles of regular verbs. They will be doubly hard for your Hmong students: there are no suffixes in Hmong, so it will be hard for your students to remember to put the past tense suffix on; and there are no final consonants or consonant clusters in Hmong; so these past tense clusters will be hard to pronounce.

Lesson Twenty

Final consonant clusters: past tense with [d]

C	C + [d]	[d]
rub	rubbed	Rudd
bribe	bribed	bride
beg	begged	bed
live	lived	lid
use	used	you'd
raise	raised	raid
rage	raged	raid
mail	mailed	made
fool	fooled	food
seem	seemed	seed
hang	hanged	had
roar	roared	rode
kill	killed	kid

---

raise	raised	raid
We raise chickens.	We raised chickens.	We raid chickens.
mail	mailed	made
We mail packages.	We mailed packages.	We made packages.
kill	killed	kid
They kill the audience.	They killed the audience.	They kid the audience.

They bribed the bride.
She seemed sad.
He begged for a bed and some food.
He raged and roared at his bride.

Notes

1. See notes for Lesson Nineteen.

Lesson Twenty-one

Unstressed final [z] and [d] in suffixes

[sɨz]	[zɨz]	[šɨz]	[čɨz]	[jɨz]
busses	roses	pushes	watches	judges
faces	breezes	rushes	pitches	badges
horses	rises	mashes	coaches	fudges
kisses	buzzes	cashes	leeches	edges
losses	causes	ashes	porches	ages
lasses	noses	leashes	couches	ledges
races	closes	brushes	notches	lodges
guesses	houses	crushes	ditches	Madge's
classes				

[tɨd]	[dɨd]
patted	kidded
rated	raided
matted	faded
dotted	padded
knotted	loaded
rotted	aided
trotted	

Notes

1. In this lesson, we have listed all the other possible phonetic combinations involving the various s suffixes and the past tense. If your students have mastered [z] and [d] at the ends of words, as in Lessons Eight and Ten, these won't cause any problems. You might want to focus briefly on these combinations, however, when you teach the grammatical points.
2. The vowel we're representing as [ɨ] is the one used in normally paced pronunciation of these suffixes. [ɨ] occurs in Hmong.

Lesson Twenty-two

Final consonant clusters with [l]

[lp]	[lb]	[lt]	[ld]
help	alb	belt	child
gulp	bulb	felt	old
scalp		cult	cold
kelp		smelt	mild

[lθ]	[lf]	[ls]	[lč]
health	self	false	gulch
wealth	shelf	else	Welch
filth	gulf	pulse	filch
stealth	elf		belch

[lǰ]	[lm]
bulge	elm
indulge	calm
bilge	film
divulge	helm

---

well
His well was amazing.

wealth
His wealth was amazing.

belt
Put the bell on the cat.

belt
Put the belt on the cat.

Come help milk the cows in the barn.
This shelf is worn out.
I called to see when the film would start.
My child felt that the elf needed help.

Notes

1. Your Hmomg students will probably substitute a w for the l, which is usually understandable.

Lesson Twenty-three

Final consonants clusters with [r]

[rp]	[rt]	[rk]	[rb]	[rd]	[rg]
harp	hurt	work	curb	card	berg
carp	court	fork	barb	board	Borg
slurp	shirt	bark	absorb	hard	
sharp	sport	shark	garb	bird	

[rč]	[rǰ]	[rm]	[rn]	[rf]	[rv]
porch	large	arm	burn	surf	curve
lurch	barge	warm	barn	scarf	starve
arch	surge	harm	warn	turf	carve
church	splurge	alarm	corn	wharf	reserve

[rθ]	[rl]
girth	girl
birth	curl
fourth	swirl
hearth	twirl

Did they come in the car?/ Did they come in the cart?
What a drafty bar!/ What a drafty barn!
He worked in a war factory./ He worked in a warm factory.

His scarf is hard to tie.
He cried when he lost the card.
His girth, at birth, caused alarm.
Work in the warm sun didn't harm him.

Notes

1. Hmong students might substitute a lengthened vowel for the [r]. There are many dialects of English which do the same, so such substitutions will be easily understandable.
2. The [rl] clusters can be turned into two-syllable words like moral, to make them easier to handle.

Lesson Twenty-four

Other final consonant clusters

[sp]	[sk]	[nθ]	[mp]
wasp	ask	month	camp
clasp	task	ninth	stamp
gasp	mask	seventh	damp
grasp	dusk	tenth	lamp

[nʒ]	[ŋk]	[ŋθ]	[nʧ]
range	thank	length	inch
strange	drink	strength	branch
orange	think		lunch
change	link		ranch

I'll ask Frank to lunch.
Can you arrange for a change in schedules?
What's the length and strength of the desk?
His task every month is to think of strange things.
I saw an orange stamp in the damp swamp.

Notes

1. These are the more commonly-occurring of the final consonant clusters not dealt with in previous lessons. They will all be difficult for Hmong speakers, as there are no consonant clusters like them at the ends of words in Hmong.
2. Note that any verb above can have the third person singular suffix added to it, and that any noun can be made plural; the result is often a three-consonant cluster. At this point, even English speakers start dropping consonants.

Lesson Twenty-five

Consonant clusters with [s] at the beginnings of words

[s]	[sl]	[sp]	[st]	[sn]	[sm]
sack	slack	----	stack	snack	smack
sane	slain	Spain	stain	----	----
sill	----	spill	still	----	----
sock	----	spoke	stoke	----	smoke
sunk	slunk	spunk	stunk	----	----
----	----	spare	stare	snare	----

[sw]	[sk]
----	----
swain	skein
swill	skill
----	----
----	skunk
swear	scare

Take up the sack./ Take up the slack./ Take up the stack.

He's sane./ He's slain.

It's sunk./ It's stunk.

Don't stare at us./ Don't swear at us.

He's soaking in the tub./ He's smoking in the tub.

The skunk scared Steven.

After our snack, we smoked a cigarette.

Stephanie spoke too soon.

He's a skillful swimmer.

She slipped in the snow.

They swore they'd drive more carefully.

Slide down the slope on the sled.

The Swede skis better than the Scot.

Notes

1. While Hmong has lots of consonant clusters at the beginnings of words, none of them start with [s]; these in English will be difficult. Your students will break up the clusters with epenthetic vowels, e.g. sipeak for speak.

Lesson Twenty-six

Consonant clusters with [l] and [r] at beginnings of words

[C]	[C+l]	[C+r]
band	bland	brand
bead	bleed	breed
cash	clash	crash
caw	claw	craw
fame	flame	frame
fee	flee	free
gas	glass	grass
go	glow	grow
pants	plants	prance
pie	ply	pry
Tim	---	trim
tie	---	try

They clashed. / They crashed.
The glass is pretty. / The grass is pretty.
She's going. / She's glowing. / She's growing.
That's his favorite band. / That's his favorite brand.
Give it a tie. / Give it a try.
He bought some pants. / He bought some plants.

Blue flowers grow in the grass.
The blue bug bled blue blood.
He eats bran flakes for breakfast.
Your present was a pleasant surprise.
The cow grazed in the plain.
The plane crashed in flames.

Notes

1. Hmong has some initial consonant clusters with [l], e.g. [mbl] or (in one of the dialects) [ndl]. There are none with [r], however.

Lessen Twenty-seven

Three-consonant clusters at beginnings of words

[spr]	[spl]	[str]	[skr]
sprain	spleen	strain	scream
spry	splash	straight	screw
spring	splurge	strong	scrub
spray	split	stride	scroll
spread	splinter	strand	screech

He strained his back. / He sprained his back.
The spring is too tight. / The string is too tight.

They splashed in the spring.
The spry old man took big strides.
The string kept the puppy from straying.
I need a strand of string.
The scream came from the square.
He screamed when she scratched him.

Notes

1. Hmong students will probably break up these clusters with epenthetic vowels, e.g. "suh-puh-rain" for sprain. That's fine.

Lesson Twenty-eight

Consonant clusters with [y]

[by]	[py]	[fy]
beautiful	pure	few
butte	pupil	futile
bureau	puny	furious
bugle	puree	confuse

[ky]	[my]	[hy]
cute	music	huge
curious	muse	human
cure	mutual	humor
cucumber	mute	humidity

She eats cucumber puree.
Don't confuse your pupils.
The Hulk is a huge human being.
She's not beautiful, but she's cute.
That's beautiful music.

Notes

1. Your Hmong students will probably interpret the [yu] sequence involved in these clusters as [iw] - a combination that doesn't occur in English, and that Americans have a hard time dealing with. The spelling system doesn't help - there's nary a y to be seen in the words above.
2. Some dialects of English have tyu sequences. If you say Tyoosday for the day after Monday, you can add a seventh column to the ones above, with Tuesday, tune, tulip and tube.

IV. Sources for Further Reference

English Language Services, Inc. Drills and Exercises in English Pronunciation. New York: Collier-Macmillan, 1971.

Series of three texts: Book I deals with consonants and vowels; Books II and III with stress and intonation. The pronunciation lessons are on contrasts within English. The introduction to each book contains suggestions for teaching the lessons in particular, and pronunciation in general.

National Indochinese Clearinghouse. General Information Series #14, "The Hmong Language: Sounds and Alphabets". Arlington, VA: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1978.

A fairly detailed description of the sounds of Hmong, preceded by a discussion of basics (Hmong names, clans, dialects), and followed by a description of the alphabet situation in Laos, and the Roman Popular Alphabet commonly used to write Hmong in the U.S. and in the refugee camps.

_____. General Information Series #15, "The Hmong Language: Sentences, Phrases and Words". Arlington, VA: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1978.

A brief description of sentence structure in Hmong, followed by information on such topics as Hmong kinship terms and terms of address, common boys' and girls' names, days of the week, etc.

_____. General Information Series #16, "Glimpses of Hmong Culture and Recent History in Laos". Arlington, VA: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1978.

An article on Hmong culture by Dr. G. L. Barney, who worked as a missionary among the Hmong during the forties and fifties; and an article on what's happened to the Hmongs in Laos over the last fifty years, by Yang See Koumarn, a Hmong refugee.

_____. General Information Series #17, "An Annotated Bibliography of Materials on the Hmongs of Laos". Arlington, VA: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1978. Available through ERIC Document Reproduction Service, P.O. Box 190, Arlington, VA 22210. ERIC Document No. 159 902: hard copy, $3.32 plus $1.04 for postage.

A bibliography of materials on the Hmongs, most of them impossible to find. General topics include the language, the culture, Hmongs in the Indochina War, opium, etc.

Nilsen, Don, and Alleen Pace Nilsen. Pronunciation Contrasts in English. New York: Regents, 1971.

A book of lessons on particular pronunciation contrasts, with lists of languages the speakers of which have trouble with the contrast. Hmong is not one of the languages listed. Lessons consist of minimal sentences, practice sentences, phonetic information and face diagrams. The introduction has suggestions for teaching the lessons.

Reed, Tipawan Truong-Quang, and Tou Fu Vang. "The Hmong Highlanders and the Lao Lowlanders". Mimeo, Governor's Center for Asian Assistance. Chicago: Illinois Office of Education, 1978.

A brief description of Hmong and Lao cultures, with a chart contrasting specific aspects of the two.

Smalley, William A. "The Problems of Consonants and Tone: Hmong (Meo, Miao)". Chapter 4 of Smalley, W.A. ed., Phonemes and Orthography: Language Planning in Ten Minority Languages of Thailand. Pacific Linguistics Series C., No. 43. Canberra, Australia: Linguistic Circle of Canberra, 1976, pp. 85-123.

A detailed phonetic analysis of both White and Blue/Green dialects of Hmong, with examples in phonemic transcription (using more or less standard Pike-Nida SIL symbols), phonetic transcription, and both the Roman Popular and Thai-based alphabets. A description of the Roman Popular alphabet is given, with discussion of the problems posed by representation of the different dialects. The article ends with a short text given in phonemic transctiption, the RPA, the Thai-based alphabet, literal translation and free translation.